

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2502

VICE RANKING MEMBER
COMMITTEE ON
FINANCIAL SERVICES

RANKING MEMBER
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DIVERSITY AND
INCLUSION

SUBCOMMITTEE ON INVESTOR PROTECTION,
ENTREPRENEURSHIP,
AND CAPITAL MARKETS

VICE RANKING MEMBER
COMMITTEE ON
FOREIGN AFFAIRS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, EURASIA,
ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA, THE PACIFIC,
AND NONPROLIFERATION

August 31, 2022

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

As you read this letter, Vladimir Putin and Russian forces continue their unconscionable assault on the sovereign nation of Ukraine. Since the Russian invasion began six months ago, over 5 million civilians have been forced to flee their homes and thousands have lost their lives, including countless innocent women and children. Russian missiles fall indiscriminately throughout the country, striking crowded shopping centers, wedding halls, and other civilian population centers hundreds of miles away from the front lines. Yet, Russia still demands—and receives—a seat at international meetings, and recent reports indicate that Russia is working to secure a visa for its foreign minister to attend a United Nations General Assembly meeting in September. Due to Russia's unjustifiable military action and the international instability it has caused, I urge you to deny any request from the Russian Federation to approve visas for Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov or other top Russian officials to enter the United States.

The Russian Federation has forfeited its right to be treated as a responsible member of the international community. Its ongoing participation in international forums threatens to delegitimize these organizations, whose express purpose is to safeguard global security and enforce peaceful relations between states. Denying entry to a government official from a rogue, adversarial nation is permitted under S.J.Res. 144, a joint resolution accompanying the 1946 U.N. Joint Headquarters Agreement, which states that "nothing in the agreement shall be construed as in any way diminishing, abridging, or weakening the right of the United States to safeguard its own security and completely to control the entrance of aliens into any territory of the United States other than the headquarters district and its immediate vicinity." Indeed, restricting or denying the visas of U.N. representatives that pose a threat to the national security interests of the United States and its allies is not merely permitted but required under the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1990.

The United States has exercised its authority to deny visas for individuals who are national security threats several times, most recently in January 2020, when the United States reportedly denied a visa to Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.¹ President Obama also denied a visa to

¹ Reuters Staff. *Reuters*. January 6, 2020. "U.S. denies Iran's Zarif a visa to attend U.N.: U.S. Official." <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-security-un-zarif/u-s-denies-irans-zarif-a-visa-to-attend-u-n-u-s-official-idUSKBN1Z605T>.

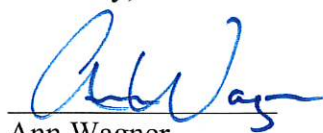
Iran's chosen Ambassador to the United Nations, Hamid Aboutalebi, in 2014.² In 1988, the United States denied a visa to Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Palestinian Liberation Organization at the time, who had been invited to speak before the United Nations General Assembly.³ Foreign Minister Lavrov and his compatriots represent equally potent threats to U.S. and allied national security interests.

President Biden has emphatically stated that the United States will "make sure that Putin will be a pariah on the international stage."⁴ Secretary Yellen emphasized this policy when she said during a House Financial Services Hearing, "President Biden's made it clear, and I certainly agree with him, that it cannot be business as usual for Russia in any of the financial institutions. He's asked that Russia be removed from the G-20 and I've made clear to my colleagues in Indonesia that we will not be participating in a number of meetings if the Russians are."⁵ I urge you to follow suit in sending an unequivocal message to the Putin regime that their participation in the upcoming United Nations General Assembly meeting is unwelcome.

As Vice Ranking Member of both the House Financial Services Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee, I have been working to expose the horrors of this unjustified war and to properly punish Russian officials. My legislation, H.R. 6891, the *Isolate Russian Government Officials Act of 2022*, requires the Department of Treasury and other financial agencies to take the necessary steps to exclude Russian government officials from key international financial meetings. This important bill overwhelmingly passed the United States House of Representatives in May 2022, and then again in July as part of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2023. The House has made a strong statement that the United States must hold Russia accountable for their actions and isolate Russian officials from the world stage.

We must continue to punish Putin and Russia for the brutality of their invasion and the potential war crimes they are committing, and I urge you to deny any Russian official entry to the United States.

Sincerely,



Ann Wagner
Member of Congress

² John Bellinger. *Lawfare*. April 13, 2014. "The Aboutalebi Visa Denial: U.S Law and Historical Precedents." <https://www.lawfareblog.com/aboutalebi-visa-denial-us-law-and-historical-precedents>.

³ Don Oberdorfer. *The Washington Post*. November 27, 1988. "U.S. Denies Entry Visa to Arafat." <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1988/11/27/us-denies-entry-visa-to-arafat/152ed8b4-2d9b-4f31-8acd-cbecb79b7098/>.

⁴ Laura Kelly. *The Hill*. February 24, 2022. "Biden: We will make Putin a 'pariah' on international stage." <https://thehill.com/policy/international/595717-biden-we-will-make-putin-a-pariah-on-international-stage/>.

⁵ C-SPAN. April 6, 2022. "Treasury Secretary Testifies on Global Financial Systems." <https://www.c-span.org/video/?519226-1/treasury-secretary-testifies-global-financial-systems> (see 34:22)